



UNITED STATES ARMY HISTORY

54th Engineer Battalion

'Daggers Forward – Daggers In!'



On order, the 54th Engineer Battalion deploys all or part of its strength to conduct mobility and survivability operations in support of V Corps or Allied Mobile Force (Land) combat operations. In addition, on short notice, deploy elements in the USEUCOM AOR in support of V Corps to provide trained, ready forces to meet operational requirements.

The 54th Engineer Battalion (COMBAT) (MECHANIZED) has a long and distinguished record of performance, not only as an outstanding engineering unit but as a formidable fighting force. Since its inception in 1917, the battalion has remained true to its motto, "Let us try, let us do."

The history of the 54th Engineer Battalion began on 7 December 1917, when it was constituted as the 42nd Engineer Battalion, (Auxiliary Forestry) at Camp American University, Washington, D.C. The United States' growing role in World War I stimulated the need for a unique organization, one capable of handling the increased demands for engineering "know how" presented by mobilization. To meet this need, General Order #108 authorized the reorganization of the 42nd into the 20th Engineer Regiment on 18 October 1918. The 20th Engineers would not only meet the engineering needs of the U.S. forces from 1917-1919, but would play a significant role in the Allied victory in World War II.

From the onset, the 20th Engineers were a unique organization. An assignment to what was, at that time, the largest regiment of any kind in the world, was no easy task. The officers and soldiers who became a part of the 20th Engineers were a select group of highly trained specialists, a quality which would be an essential ingredient in the unit's future success. By 18 October 1918 the unit consisted of a Regimental Headquarters, 14 Battalion Headquarters, 49 Forestry companies, 28 Engineer Service Companies, and two attached Engineer Service Battalions, totaling 268 Officers and 19,385 men!

Following its organization in 1918, the 20th Engineer Regiment deployed to Noisier, France, as a part of the American Expeditionary Forces. For the next two years the soldiers of the 20th toiled endlessly constructing roads, barracks, airfields, emplacing mines and obstacles and installing bridges in support of the AEF. For their valiant labors the 20th Engineers were awarded a streamer in the colors of the Victory Medal to honor the outstanding performance rendered by the "To build and To Fight" unit.

After the end of WWI the 20th Engineers were deactivated at Camp Merritt, New Jersey, on 7 July 1919. The 42nd Engineer (General Service) (Regiment) was reconstituted on 1 October 1933, as an inactive unit of the Regular Army. With this same designation it was activated on 1 June 1940, at Fort Benning, Georgia, and one month later was reorganized and redesignated as the 2nd Battalion, 20th Engineer Regiment. After completing basic training and two major construction projects in Louisiana and Mississippi, the Regiment deployed overseas aboard the Hugh L. Scott from Norfolk Virginia on 22 October to assist in halting Hitler's march across Europe.

Assigned as part of the Western Task Force, whose mission was to make assault landings on the coast of Africa, the 20th Engineers embarked on a course which would earn the unit its place in the annals of American Military History.

In November 1942, the 2nd Battalion of the 20th Engineer Regiment landed at the port of Fedala, French Morocco, as part of the 3rd Infantry Division, successfully assisting the infantry in securing and clearing the beachhead. Earning the Algeria/French Morocco Streamer with Arrowhead. While assigned to Fedala, the 2nd Battalion cleared docks, operated railroad trains, unloaded ships and ran a ration warehouse which supported the entire Western Task Force. In mid November of the same year, select elements of the regiment participated in the assault landings on Casablanca. These elements of the 20th Engineers were subsequently charged with operating a phosphate pier, and constructing the site for the historic Casablanca conference between President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill.



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In March 1943 the Regiment was assigned as Corps Engineers in support of II Corps, receiving the Tunisia Campaign Streamer, during which time the 20th constructed a Regimental Rifle Range, performed extensive mine clearing operations, and constructed a major road network in support of the British 8th Army, extending its supply lines by some 20 miles. Near the end of the Tunisia campaign Company "B" of the 20th Engineer Regiment acted as Corps Engineers for the French Corps Franc D'Afrique, during which time the regiment removed an estimated 200,000 German "teller" mines. During these activities COL Arnold, the regimental commander, became a casualty. Following extensive assault training with the 3rd Infantry Division, the 20th participated in the July 10, 1943, invasion of Sicily. The unit was then assigned as 7th U.S. Army Engineers and tasked to construct numerous timber and Bailey bridges, plus several major runways. In November of 1943 the Regiment departed Tunisia with 2nd and 1st Battalions stopping in Palermo and Trapani, Italy where Battalions earned the Sicily Streamer with Arrowhead and constructed two airstrips before rejoining the remainder of the Regiment in England on 23 November.

The early days of December 1943 found the 20th Engineers working full-force constructing camps in support of Operation Overlord. The camps which involved extensive planning and meticulous execution, were designed as a contingency in the event that France was invaded. The work involved in the Overlord project taxed the expertise of the unit to the maximum extent possible. The 20th not only constructed the camp site, but also ran supply depots, conducted amphibious exercises and functioned as Military Police.

On 15 January 1944, while on assignment in England, the 20th Combat Engineer Regiment was reformed into the 1171st Engineer Combat Group. The old 1st Battalion, 20th Engineer Regiment, became the 20th Engineer Combat Battalion. The former 2nd Battalion, 20th Regiment, became the 1340th Engineer Combat Battalion. Both the 20th Engineer Battalion and the 1340th Engineer Battalion were assigned to the 1171st Engineer Group. It is through the 1340th Engineer Combat Battalion that the 54th Engineer Battalion traces its lineage.

On 6 June 1944, two elements of the 1171st Group (the 20th Engineer Battalion and the 1340th Engineer Battalion), were participating in the D-day invasion of Normandy, earning the Normandy Streamer with Arrowhead. On the night of 9-10 June, "A" Company, 1340th Engineer Battalion distinguished itself by constructing a sixty foot double single Bailey bridge in the dark while under heavy enemy fire. For this exceptional display of valor and technical expertise the 1340th received a War Department Presidential Unit Citation. Another significant incident occurred during the crossing of the Our River just north of Trevieres, France. An enemy road block, which was effectively covered by small arms fire, denied access to the bridge crossing. After failing to eliminate the obstacle with direct fire from a medium tank, the plan was conceived to have three volunteers, each carrying a 50 pound charge of TNT, ride behind the turret of a tank up to the site and place the charge. The three soldiers Privates Bradford, Farrar, and Szelwach, successfully breached the obstacle and returned unhurt. Each of them was awarded the Silver Star. This campaign gave the battalion Northern France Streamer.

By November 1944, Vossenack, Germany was the scene of intense fighting between German and American Forces. It was against this backdrop that three battalions of the 1171st Engineer Group executed their most outstanding achievement. Enemy forces had cut off or driven out elements of the 28th Infantry Division who had attempted to secure the Vossenack area for U.S. occupation. From 5-10 November three battalions from Group (the 20th, 1340th, and the 146th) were committed as infantry and tasked to relieve the depleted infantry forces. During those five days the 1340th suffered over 50% casualties, but the engineers recaptured Vossenack from German control and held their position until a complete withdrawal of the 28th Infantry Division had been executed. It was during this campaign that the battalion received the Rhineland Streamer.



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In January of 1945 the battalions of the Group were supporting the 8th, 1st and 30th Infantry Divisions in the Ardennes forest following the initial German offensive thrust into allied lines. By this time German forces were making a desperate attempt to hold their ground in the face of a major U.S. counteroffensive designed to drive the Germans back to the Rhine. Thus the battalion received the Ardennes/Alsace Streamer.

One of the crucial tasks which faced the 1340th Engineer Battalion during the initial phase of the counteroffensive (in addition to extensive mine and obstacle emplacement, coupled with bridge installation) was the maintenance of the major supply routes used to resupply all three divisions in the area. Extreme weather conditions along with rocky frozen soil required the efforts of every engineer unit within Group to keep the roads open. In April of 1945, elements of the 1340th constructed the crucial bridge near Gilenbourg, Germany, which allowed American and Russian forces to link up. As U.S. Forces continued their march of liberty across Germany, the 1340th Engineers literally paved the way. When V Corps and the Third U.S. Army began their move into Bavaria and Czechoslovakia, the men of the 1340th Engineers were there: they built bridges, repaired roads and met the challenges laid before them. Here the Battalion received the Central Europe Streamer.

When the formal surrender of Germany became effective on 7 May 1945, the majority of the 1171st Engineer Group was in Czechoslovakia supporting the 1st Infantry Division and the 16th Armored Division. The 20th Engineer Battalion remained on occupation duty with the 1st Infantry Division in Czechoslovakia until the 2nd of January, 1946, when the 1340th was returned to the states and deactivated at Camp Kilmer, New Jersey. On 15 September of 1948, the 1340th Engineer Battalion (redesignated the 8th Engineer Combat Battalion) was reactivated at Panzer Kaserne, Boblingen Germany. On 1 December of the same year the unit was redesignated the 54th Engineer Battalion and assigned to support three Armored Cavalry Regiments in the Constabulary until late 1950.

In October 1953 the Battalion moved to Fliegerhorst Kaserne, Leipheim, Germany, and on 5 June 1953 was designated the 54th Engineer Battalion (Combat). On 3 May 1954 the Battalion with the attached 93rd Engineer Company (Float Bridge) demonstrated the use and capabilities of the class 60 floating Bridge at the Gunzburg Bridge Training Site on the Donau River. Numerous high ranking officers were present for the demonstration including British General Sir Richard Gale, CINC, NORTHAG, General William H. Hoge, CINC, USAREUR, and Lt General A.C. McAuliffe, Commander, Seventh Army. In 1956 the 54th Engineer Battalion assisted in the construction of the Hohenfels ring road at the Hohenfels training area.

The Battalion departed Germany on 15 April 1957 aboard the USS Buckner as part of Operation Gyroscope, and was subsequently assigned to the 2nd U.S. Army, and attached to the U.S. Armor Center at Fort Knox, Kentucky. In March of 1958 the 54th was designated a Strategic Army Corps (STRAC) unit and was attached to the XVIII Airborne Corps, the STRAC Headquarters. While stationed at Fort Knox the battalion constructed the tank monument located at the center of post and performed rehabilitation work at Camp Pickett, Virginia. In February 1960 while on a training exercise at Camp Breckenridge, Kentucky, an emergency Special Task Force was sent from the battalion to Tell City, where an Air Force plane had crashed with nuclear weapons aboard. An Engineer Recovery & Decontamination Team was sent to clear the wreckage. The battalion was designated a superior STRAC unit in 1961 after its' excellent performance in a STRAC Mobility Test Exercise. The 54th once again deployed to Europe during the Berlin crisis as a part of Operation Round-Out. It departed the United States on 10 October 1961, aboard the USNS Gordon, arriving at its home for the next 23 years of Wildflecken, Germany, on 21 October 1961.



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From the battalion's arrival in 1961 until the opening of the East-West border in November 1989, the battalion had the mission as the V Corps Covering Force Engineers in support of the 14th and then the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiments. During that time the proximity of the battalion's station (at Wildflecken) and its General Defense Plan mission earned it the nickname "the One Inch Line" Battalion. The battalion also relieved the Regiment on the border on several tours. In 1986, the 54th Engineer Battalion became the first Corps Combat Engineer Battalion to become mechanized.

On 24 December 1990, the 54th was notified to prepare to deploy to Saudi Arabia in support of Operation Desert Shield as part of VII Corps. A Recon party was in Saudi Arabia within a week and the advance party deployed on 19 January 1991. As the air war of Desert Storm raged, the battalion closed on Ad Damman port by 31 January, and the vehicles arrived in the same week. The 54th was attached to the 1st Armored Division on 1 February 1991. The battalion played catch up, hurrying to move into the central Saudi Arabian Desert around Hafr al Batin (TAA Thompson) to begin support for the 1st Armored Division. Upon arrival in TAA Thompson the battalion task-organized in conjunction with the 16th Engineer Battalion to support the three maneuver brigades. TF 54 was composed of HHC/54, A/54, C/54 and A/16 in Direct Support to 2nd Brigade (the largest maneuver brigade.) TF 16th comprised HHC/16, B/16, B/54 and D/16 in Direct Support of 1st Brigade (the lead brigade). TF SAPPER (later changed to TF WILDCAT) was formed from HHC elements of the 54th and the 16th, C/16 and D/54 in Direct Support of 3rd Brigade, which took the division's right sector alongside the 3AD.

From 14-17 February the division conducted the movement to FAA GARCIA as part of the deception plan that shifted VII Corps 100 kilometers west of the tri-border area in order to conduct the flanking movement through western Iraq. While in FAA Garcia the battalion continued to distribute ammunition and integrate drills with the maneuver forces.

The ground offensive commenced on 24 February, and although 1AD was not scheduled to attack until G+1, the speed of the advance in the East prompted VII Corps to issue a warning order to move out towards the line of departure by 1200. TF 54 crossed the LD (the double "Saudi Berm" which comprised the de facto border) at approximately 1900. During the 87 hours of the division attack, over 244 KM's were covered, hundreds of enemy vehicles were destroyed and 2100 EPW's were captured. During the battle the Battalion suffered 1 soldier killed and another wounded due to friendly fire from a boundary incursion by the 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment. The battalion provided mobility support throughout the battle, reduced bunkers, and marked the Brigade's "Log Line" safe travel route into Iraq. The battalion received the Defense and Liberation of Kuwait streamer for its participation and actions in the ground war campaign from 24 to 28 February 1991.

Following the cease fire the Battalion was moved to northern Kuwait, and then later back into Iraq, as it conducted extensive denial missions destroying enemy equipment. Throughout the denial missions the battalion destroyed countless vehicles and tons of stored ammunition. On 10 March, D/54 and most of HHC moved back to King Khalid Military City in Saudi Arabia to construct the Divisional Redeployment Assembly Area (Camp Kasserine). The battalion was awarded the Southwest Asia Cease-fire streamer for its outstanding service in Iraq, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia from 1 March until the last of the battalion redeployed to Germany. For its service with the 1st Armored Division the Battalion was awarded the Valorous Unit Citation Embroidered Iraq/Kuwait

The battalion redeployed to Germany from 28 April through 5 May, and its equipment returned to Germany in late July through September. The 54th Engineer Battalion returned to its mission of supporting primarily the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment, along with other units in V Corps as required, as part of the smaller, more mobile U.S. Army in Europe.



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Once the battalion completed its' redeployment to Germany it immediately began inventorying, cleaning, and reconditioning personal combat equipment and weapons. Preparations for the return of the battalions' vehicles and equipment were begun in anticipation of the extensive maintenance, repair and replacement that would be needed to get the vehicles and equipment back to readiness standards. The supported unit stayed the same, the Blackhorse Regiment, but now the battalion had to be prepared to road march its' vehicles and equipment up to 250 kilometers in any direction and begin mobility, counter mobility and survivability missions in support of the Blackhorse.

Soon after the completion of the maintenance stand-to, the battalion went back to its' regular CMTC rotation schedule in Hohenfels. The battalion primarily supported the 11th ACR, but also provided much support to other USAREUR units such as the Berlin Brigade, 1st Armored Division, 1st and 3rd Infantry divisions and the OPFOR maneuver battalion at CMTC. The 54th Engineer Battalion completed numerous rotations in 1992 in this capacity, and provided excellent training benefit for the maneuver units conducting exercises at CMTC. It was during this time and the period shortly after, that the battalion set an annual OPTEMPO for its armored personnel carriers of 1832 miles per vehicle, 3 times that of any Engineer Battalion in Germany, an a solid testimony to the amount of quality training conducted by the 54th.

Delta Company, upon its return from Southwest Asia, received the ACE Mobile Force (Land) mission and immediately began training to meet the requirements of the NATO rapid deployment force. The AMF (L) company deployed to and conducted training in Italy, Turkey, England, and Denmark as well as participating in rotations to CMTC with the battalion, when available. Not only was Delta Company required to train for and conduct AMF missions, but it also had to be prepared to deploy with the 54th if ever called to do so.

After spending much of 1992 in the field, 1993 began with the battalion preparing for the Engineer Restructure Initiative (ERI) transition that was to begin in February 1993. Reconfiguring under the ERI meant the battalion was to lose one line company, one line platoon per company, all of the vehicles and equipment for each of those units, and over one third of the battalion's soldiers. Reconfigurations such as this have normally taken from nine to twelve months to complete, but the 54th completed this extremely difficult task in 90 days, faster than any previous unit in USAREUR.

On 15 June 1993, the 54th received official notification that it was to inactivate, with an end-date in January 1994. During the subsequent ceremony the Battalion was awarded the Cold War Streamer, by the German Government, for its enduring performance against the Warsaw Pact and the assistance provided for in the reunification of Germany.

On 15 January 1994 the Dagger Battalions held an Inactivation Ceremony at Hanau Germany, hosted by the 130th Engineer Brigade.

On 16 February 1997 the 54th Engineer Battalion was reactivated.

54th Engineer Battalion, 130th Engineer Brigade returned from a 10-month Iraq deployment in December 2003.

Throughout the deployment, the 54th Engineer Battalion provided command and control for the initial breach lanes into Iraq and installed and maintained several assault float bridges on the Euphrates River. The unit provided combat engineering and construction support from Ar Ramadi west to the Syrian and Jordanian borders as well as numerous bridge and route reconnaissance missions throughout the western sector of Iraq. The troops conducted weapons searches to destroy caches being used for attacks



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on military convoys. They also provided security for operations at the Abu Ghurayb prison complex and Logistical Support Area Dogwood. Prior to redeploying, the Battalion provided command and control for Task Force Rocketeer, a Combined Joint Task Force-7 directed task force, which removed more than 60 SA-2 and Al Samoud missiles littered throughout Iraq. They also provided construction support to the 130th Engineer Brigade at Logistical Support Area Anaconda, improving the living conditions of more than 700 Soldiers and conducting route reconnaissance and clearance missions.

The unit suffered one casualty during its deployment.

The Battalion was located at Logistical Support Area Dogwood for the majority of the deployment and moved to Logistical Support Area Anaconda in September.